CHAPTER 13

Raising Children in Strangeness

Cosmopolitan Mothering and Domestic Helpers in Expatriate Families

CATHERINE GOETZE

For seven years I lived as an expat in China. It was my job, and associated visa, which brought me and my family to what we called a "small provincial town" with five million inhabitants, the city of Ningbo. I and my family were commonly regarded as an exception. Most expatriations are expected to depend on the man's job; only a few expatriate families were led by female household heads (in research, too, skilled female migrants are underresearched; see Kofman 2004; Kofman and Raghuram 2015). Being an expat mother poses particular challenges to harmonizing mothering and working, as it does to negotiating life as a foreigner. Mothering in expatriate working contexts multiplies the fundamental sexual politics dilemma of difference (we're mothers) and equality (we're equal to men) (Pateman 1992). The chapter discusses *cosmopolitan* mothering as an attempt to negotiate the multiplication of this difference–equality dilemma that occurs in migration. Some of these dilemmas are ubiquitous because they are structurally embedded in capitalist and patriarchal economies. In capitalist Western societies mothering is often individualized and leaves the mother with difficulties of situating herself as claiming equal rights as citizen and worker while also claiming her difference as mother and woman (DiQuinzio 2013, 1993). However, some of these dilemmas are specific to

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migration when difference and equality need to be negotiated across cultural, linguistic, national, and social boundaries.

Mothering implies raising children into what Sara Ruddick called "social acceptability," that is, "the production of a young adult that is acceptable to [the mother's] group" (Ruddick 1980, 349). However, for expats (and migrants more generally), there is no natural and obvious group to which these mothers and their children belong. The "home country" might offer little orientation since the children also are often strangers in their parents' home country: they might have never lived there (for thorough discussion, see Sander 2016). Inside their family there might also be contradictory and multiple standards of culturally defined social acceptability if the parents are again from different cultural and social backgrounds. For these children, and their parents, the native, locally rooted, and nation-state constituted question, "Where are you from?" has no simple answer except for "The world is my home" (Gaspoz 2013; Grimshaw and Sears 2008).

"The world is my home," on the other hand, is the classical trope of cosmopolitanism. I argue in this chapter that cosmopolitan mothering constitutes a response to the multiple dilemmas of equality–difference: the feminist dilemma between mothering and work, the dilemma of being a privileged expatriate migrant but whose options to significantly shape her environment are largely out of her control, and the dilemma of homing in strangeness. Cosmopolitan mothering specifically allows bridging sociocultural divides because it requires translating between different and varying subjectivities: of the mother and child, but also of the family and its environment. Such translation or bridging experiences can be enabled and facilitated through a widening of family relationships with the strange environment as, for instance, represented by the integration of an other-cultured helper, a nanny, into the family.

Yet, the "nanny question" (Tronto 2002) represents another layer of the difference–equality conundrum of feminism in general and in expatriation contexts in particular. Since families where women are main breadwinners do not simply inverse the traditional female–male division of labor, working mothers are confronted with the difficulty that their professional work depends on the care work of another woman. Joan Tronto argues that the asymmetric relationship between nannies and mothers can have a deeply political effect on children. She warns that children will be "immersed into a racist culture" if these ethnic or national differences are translated into a tyrannical situation for the nannies (Tronto 2002, 39). Given the particularities of care work, such family tyrannies are much more likely to develop (Tronto 2002, 40). In expat situations this dilemma is reinforced through the enormous wealth differentials between the working

mother and the nanny. This socioeconomic asymmetry can rapidly turn into a racialized inequality. Such a racialization might counteract the cosmopolitanism of expatriation. Instead of fostering respect for diversity and the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, having a nanny might lead to justifying and cementing global inequalities.

I discuss in this chapter whether cosmopolitan mothering can prevent this. Cosmopolitan mothering has yet not been thought through, or empirically analyzed, despite the importance that has been attached to education in cosmopolitan studies (Igarashi and Saito 2014; Matthews and Sidhu 2005; Nussbaum 1994; Todd 2008). Yet, there the focus commonly has been on formal education in schools and universities. This reflects the habitual silencing of the home, family, and women/mothers in political theory, where childhood and home experiences are either not considered at all or relegated to the status of illustrative anecdotes. These studies elude the question of where respect for diversity and tolerance should come from if not from family, early childhood, and "home." Studies of expatriation, on the other hand, have also neglected and minimized the dilemmas of mothering in strangeness. A number of studies have considered the question mainly under the angle of the socioeconomic asymmetry between hiring families and helpers, arguing that these practices are neocolonial. With this discussion of cosmopolitan mothering, I wish to nuance and rectify those analyses that see the hiring of domestic helpers by expatriates as reproduction of colonial practices. As will be argued further later, despite pointing correctly to the inequalities of global capitalism, such views are nevertheless flawed in the ways they see both expatriation and mothering.

The observations of this chapter rely on an auto-ethnography of my experience of hiring a nanny (*"ayi*" in Chinese) for my second child who was born during my seven-year stay in China. In 2007, I was seconded by the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom to the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) campus to build up the School of International Studies. I was accompanied by my partner and my eldest daughter. We lived on the university campus with colleagues from approximately thirty other countries. My eldest daughter went to an international day school. I gave birth to my second daughter in Shanghai in 2011. Throughout the seven years, I kept a "field journal," a personal diary, in which I noted my observations of living and working in China. When I was pregnant, my journal was dedicated to my concerns and observations about organizing day care. My notes reflect the cultural, ethical, and social conflicts that I confronted when my family hired an *"ayi"* for one and a half years. My personal experience of cosmopolitan mothering adds an inside

voice to thinking about the role of mothering in globalization processes, specifically in expatriation, and with specific respect to the "nanny question." As Adams, Ellis, and Jones point out, personal narratives are a method of choice to "inform readers about aspects of cultural life that other researchers may not be able to know" (2017, 2). My personal experience can illuminate practices and processes of mothering that outside accounts have either ignored or inadequately rendered.

CONTEXTUALIZING STRANGENESS, UNDERSTANDING EXPATRIATION

There are many terms to capture the familiarity of strangeness that comes with global mobility: third spaces, transculturation, limbus or liminal spaces, or with respect to children, "third culture kids" (Anderson 1999; Bell-Villada and Orr 2011; Hoerder, Hébert, and Schmitt 2005; Pascoe 1990; Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock 2010; Trigo 2000). All of these signify how settled cultures flow into each other in the life space of a person and keep a migrant's identity fluid. Most of these notions are predicated on the assumptions of a binary that postulates a "home" versus a "foreign" culture. They situate the migration experience somewhere in-between and predominantly as an experience of "lack of . . .": home, belonging, or roots, and tend to associate expatriation with traumatic experiences of loss (Cason 2018). All these notions exactly do not assume that a person can experience this space as one of belonging and of one's own; one for which the contrast of home and foreign is not reducible to a binary and which is filled with a plentiful life experience of its own.

The notion of home in English has a double meaning[1]: home can mean the country that the family is from with its culture, language, cuisine, customs and costumes, flag and anthem; and the site of everyday experiences, of the mundane, repeated, habitual practices of daily life, of the daily routines and interactions with immediate family and friends as well as the relevant institutions (e.g., school, workplace). Both understandings of home can, again, be multinational and multilayered. Because the meaning of "home" as the home country often slips through the fingers and memory of migrants, and is extremely difficult to transmit to children who do not experience that far-away country as *their* home country, the other meaning of "home" as the site of everyday gains great importance (Hatfield 2010). Whether within the house or outside, this everyday homing is necessarily multinational, most often multilingual, and infused with many different cultural influences (Franke 2008).

The difficulties of finding an appropriate name for this everywhere-and-nowhere situation are similar to the difficulties of finding an appropriate term to describe the experience of families who have come to foreign countries settling temporarily and mainly for work (Farrer 2018; Kunz 2016). Much of the ethnographic research on expatriation insists that white people reproduce a sort of neocolonial whiteness and are associated with (unjustified) privilege (Coles and Fechter 2008; Debnár 2016; Fechter 2010; Fechter and Walsh 2010; Lundström 2013, 2014; Beaverstock 2002, 2012). This finding is often predicated on singling out and observing one particular high-income group of expatriates who are sociologically, financially, and often nationally/ethnically apart, like US managers in global oil industries (Fechter 2016) or British bankers in Singapore (Beaverstock 2002). This specific socioprofessional group might be contrasted with "local" defined groups that are perceived and represented as poor and underprivileged.

The focus on highly elitist forms of expatriation downplays the social, cultural, and professional differentiations among expatriates, and it ignores that expatriation is significantly conditioned by local laws, customs, social expectations, and authorities. Expatriation is voluntary and enabled through legal provisions that encourage and regulate temporary settlement in a foreign country. Thus, expatriates have sought-after professional skills, and it is the host country's demand that allows for their mobility (notwithstanding that the definition of necessary skills and qualifications relies in itself on a hierarchical world order of professions and training). This means that there is far larger diversity of expatriate professions than only high-income managers and bankers. It also means that the migration process is conditioned by authorities external to the migrating family. A large variety of visa regimes exist for professional expats, depending on their professions, whether the employment is sponsored by a company or self-initiated, whether the migrant is alone or with a family, and sometimes also depending on factors like health or age of the migrant (in China, for instance, different age restrictions applied to different professions, and certain health conditions were barred from visa). Contrary to the assumption of privilege, expatriates' living conditions in the country are precarious because they depend on their work contracts (which are commonly fixed-term) and often obscure and arbitrary immigration policies. Through the tight connection between residence permit and jobs, state, regional, and local authorities strictly control and manage migration flows, settlement, and living conditions of expatriates, particularly in China (Leonard and Lehmann 2019; Lehmann 2014).

The large variety of working conditions and visa and residence permits that allow expats to stay in a country make it impossible to treat them

as a homogenous group (Kunz 2016). Rather, expats form part of the urban middle and, if income allows, upper classes of global and globalizing cities—what Hagen Koo has termed the global middle class, and this also with respect to their income (2016). The temporary upward social mobility that expatriates experience has to be seen in this context because it is more often the result of disparities between the purchasing power of their "home" salary and the local economy than by their salary as such. If their home country is an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) high-income country, and if their host country is a low-income country, then an expat's income locally allows good or even very high quality of life; but, the same income might situate them at the lower or middle income section of the middle class in their home country, and moving back home may imply a substantial loss of disposable income and a diminished sociofinancial status.

Most accounts of expatriation fail to account for the family dynamics of navigating the precarities and uncertainties of expatriation, and they neglect in particular the role and importance of mothering (Cooke 2001). If expatriate mothering is reduced to "white mothers reproducing colonialism" (Coles and Fechter 2008; Fechter 2010; Lundström 2013), then the trailing spouses' and children's agency is reduced to being a reproductive accessory to the male breadwinner; their own agency—of having to position themselves, negotiate and mediate *their* situations, and arrange themselves with their expatriate lives—is obliterated.

Such reduction further downplays the importance of mothering as caring, nurturing, raising, orienting, and socializing children and ignores the multiple dilemmas of expatriate women and mothers. Because expatriates are often acutely and even anxiously aware of the fixed term of their stay, "integration" and "assimilation" are not desired. Rather, the objective for the family is to be able to (re)connect to any future destination and/or their home country (Ma 2019). This explains, for instance, the attraction of international schools that offer curricula in English or home languages because these are seen as less disruptive of the child's educational trajectory than local schools with their foreign curriculum and language.[2] Families will also more often engage in national holiday celebrations than they would back home in an attempt to infuse their family with "home traditions," or participate in nationalizing activities like cultural days organized by their home country's embassies or cultural organizations. These attempts to (re)connect represent the difficulties of juggling the many nonunitary references that define an expatriate's family's life at the same time as they often constitute ironic subversions of precisely the multiple strangeness of a multinational migrant family.

COSMOPOLITANISM AND MOTHERING

Much of this process of navigating, translating, and mitigating strangeness is the responsibility of mothers, a task adding to already existing dilemmas and difficulties women experience when they need to position themselves as spouses, mothers, daughters, and former, future, or current working women in multinational and multicultural contexts. What Ulrich Beck called "cosmopolitan competence" is a crucial social practice of living the many dilemmas and conflicts that this positioning process brings (Beck cited in Bielsa 2016, 6). Cosmopolitan mothering means navigating the strangeness into which the family has been thrown, and it means also managing the strangeness that will, over time, settle within the family when the children develop their own communication and integration with the external world.

Cosmopolitanism is, from a sociological point of view, a practice and a habitus of establishing a dialogical relationship between oneself and the other (Beck 2002; see also Beck and Grande 2007; Mau, Mewes, and Zimmermann 2008; Olofsson and Ohman 2007). Kwame Anthony Appiah calls it "a conversation across boundaries" (Appiah 2005, 267; 2007, 85). Contrary to universalism, cosmopolitanism reposes on the idea that differences between people, cultures, individuals, and ideas and norms exist, that eventually there is an impossibility of resuming or synthesizing these differences in a whole, and that, yet, understanding is possible. As Appiah says:

> I'm using the world "conversations" not only for literal talk but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others. And I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters, properly conducted, are valuable in themselves. Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it helps people get used to one another." (Appiah 2007, 85)

When conceived as a social practice of dialogue, cosmopolitanism is fundamentally relational, and it requires the capacity of the individuals in conversation to accept difference. It also requires the capacity to be silent over potential cultural value conflicts that would turn out as incommensurable if made explicit.

The cultural clashes and dilemmas that need to be absorbed, mediated, and somehow solved in cosmopolitan mothering quite often interweave with the work–life balance and female autonomy dilemmas that expatriation brings for working mothers. Mothering in expatriate contexts poses

strenuous demands of negotiating and maintaining fragile balances within the family and between the family and its environment, and juggling a large variety of differences on many levels (e.g., family, work, culture). In my case, for instance, I was exposed to the typical women-at-work dilemma of balancing mothering with work (in a British-Chinese institution with colleagues from more than thirty countries), and I had to balance mothering in a French-German family in an internationalized (for my daughters' live worlds) and Chinese environment.

When women are the main breadwinners, traditional family divisions of labor are not simply inversed. Working mothers are not exempt from household duties in the same way as the traditional male breadwinner is. My household is no exception to this rule, and my partner and I shared work and child-raising duties. As with most trailing spouses, my partner had given up his job to join me in China. Yet, he did not intend to stay idle despite not having a work permit and soon found himself occupied with projects that were not salary work but nevertheless professional work. This is common for expat partners. Many engage in professional training charity work or in unsalaried work. Opportunities for spouses to find "their place" are crucial to the success of expatriations; in the absence of these, the expatriation is likely to fail and the family with it (Harvey 1998; Harvey and Wiese 1998; Lysova et al. 2015; McNulty and Moeller 2018).

Consequently, when our second daughter was born in 2011, stay-at-home dad "mothering" was not an option, and the question how to organize day care quickly became pressing. Nursery or preschool was nonexistent. Chinese and international preschool were both available only from the ages of three and two years, respectively; my maternity leave ended after the statuary three months. Our own family could not be mobilized, even if my partner's mother had offered to come for some time. However, visitor visas to China were restricted to three months, and she was becoming too old to look after a baby or toddler.

Initially, my partner and I had resisted hiring a domestic helper. Our first daughter went straight away to school when we moved to China, despite this involving a two-hour return bus ride on which my partner accompanied her every day for a year. We cleaned our house ourselves and did our shopping and cooking ourselves. We had mainly two reservations about following the very common practice of Chinese middle-class families hiring a helper. For one, we were very aware of the political economy of care chains that exist in China nationally between cities and rural areas. My partner had participated in a summer student volunteer program where our university students would go to remote rural areas to teach in schools over summer. He had witnessed the difficulties and miseries of China's

so-called "left-behind children"; children who were raised by their usually overwhelmed grandparents because their parents had moved away to take up factory jobs. In China, inner migration from the Western rural areas to the Eastern coastal cities commonly allows for a substantial increase of income, but it leaves the left-behind families highly vulnerable. We did not want to participate in this ambiguous economy.

Another reason for our reluctance to hire a nanny was our awareness of the many cultural differences that we would need to overcome. Engaging with children, especially babies and toddlers, caring for house and family, and entering into our domestic intimacy would crystallize the culture clash in our encounter with China and the Chinese-as-other. The cultural shock to be expected would be not only between Westernness and Chineseness but also between very different social milieus. Most women working as *ayis* are rural women, most of the times barely literate, sometimes not even Mandarin speakers (or with a heavy accent),[3] parochial, and generally poorly educated. We, on the other hand, are urbanites, mobile, globalized, multilingual but not Chinese speakers, and highly educated.

Yet, all options considered, there was no alternative to hiring a domestic helper despite our disapproval of the hierarchical socioeconomic system that enables such employment.

Cultural conflicts often niche in the very tiny happenings, the mundane decisions of the everyday, and the fuzzy inner space of the intimate. Consequently, care for little human beings consists of a continuous string of opportunities for cultural misunderstandings and disagreements. For outsiders, these cultural encounters often go unnoticed or are not recognized in the importance they have for the families and mothers living them because they happen in an infinitesimally small universe where everyday life is absorbed entirely by utterly ordinary life practices like keeping children clean and their environment hygienic, testing the temperature of the bathwater, providing food and comfort, monitoring sleep patterns and digestive behaviors, or picking up dropped toys. In practice, our cross-cultural differences would play out over questions like whether the *ayi* should use the pram or carry babies and toddlers instead, whether children should sleep in the parents' or *ayi's* bed instead of their own cot, at what times children should be sleeping (six o'clock in the evening or whenever they'll fall asleep) and for how long (one-hour or three-hour afternoon nap), whether the children should be fed while seated at the table or running around the house (with the *ayi* running behind them), what to feed them (carrot puree or rice congee), how often and at what times, whether to wash children in the morning or in the evening, or whether to let them play in the dirt or to keep their clothes clean and dry, whether cold weather requiring padded

woollen jumpers and beanies means temperatures below 24° C or below 14° C, whether constant photographing of the children and spreading the photos on social media is acceptable or not, whether baby girls need to wear dresses and hairbows and baby boys blue clothes and miniature pistols to indicate their sex, whether babies should play on phones or on playgrounds, whether sweets are a treat for babies or should be avoided at all. These are just a few of the many socioculturally different viewpoints on raising children that popped up in our shared parenting with the *ayi*.

Every single one of these daily problems potentially represents, in all their banality, a range of cross-cultural misunderstandings and differences. These can become enormous if they become symbolic tokens of much wider issues like "good" motherhood or the value of a (new) human life, or, as particular to migration contexts, human belonging. They may become symbolic of the other dilemmas sketched out earlier, namely the family's internal division of labor or the contradictory integration of expatriate families in the local economy. No matter what the family arrangement is, whether the mother has given up her job to follow the male breadwinner, or, like in our case, if the woman is the main income earner but the family arrangement avoids a reproduction of a traditional sex division of labor, there is a strong possibility that a mother will be accused of not appropriately caring for the child if she hires an *ayi*. Conflicts over appropriate daily practices of care, hence, may touch raw nerves because "talk of values, then, is really a way of talking about certain of our desires" (Appiah 2007, 21). Most particularly, when it comes to mothering strange children, we are talking about desires of caring adequately for children and being recognized for the efforts of making cultural shocks and dissonances less painful and disorienting for children. Mothering in strange contexts, therefore, requires defining terms of living together that prevent cultural conflicts from becoming conflicts over values and desires.

COSMOPOLITAN MOTHERING AND THE RELATIONAL SITUATING OF THE SELF IN SOCIETY

Because cosmopolitanism as a practice of living together is nonessentialist, it lends itself as an intellectual and moral framework for mothering in strangeness. Cosmopolitanism requires the acceptance of diversity and multiplicity. Cosmopolitan mothering is, hence, fundamentally based on the idea of de-essentializing motherhood. This means that the value of the love and care brought to the child and family cannot be measured by some abstract, arbitrarily yet most often patriarchally defined yardstick of

"good" motherhood. Cosmopolitan mothering has strangeness built into the challenge of giving love and care; it is entirely about navigating the family's and child's environment in order to be able to give love and care despite the fluidity and strangeness of the situation the family is in.

Such an openness allows overcoming most conflicts over the myriad of small cultural conflicts that mark the daily lives of mothers, children, and *ayis* in China; such conflicts are overcome not by solving them but by letting them, on the contrary, stand as conflicts and contradictions. If cultures and care are not essentialized, the question of dressing, feeding, hugging, encouraging, and educating a child becomes a mere question of practical habits but not of values and desires.

These processes of what I call navigating strangeness are nothing other than processes of learning and acquiring skills and knowledge in order to make bearable the conflicts that may arise out of these intersecting dilemmas. As the notions of conversation and dialogue imply, this involves positioning oneself in a wider web of social relations and communicating between differences. An important part of this was, in our case, the acceptance of the ambiguous position of being part of China's economic and social fabric and to have only limited options to act on this situation. An important first step in accounting for the ambiguity of our position was to seek to hire an *ayi* under the best legal and economic conditions possible. The relationship between an employer and an *ayi* is by its very nature asymmetric, and *ayis* are, as most domestic workers, vulnerable to exploitation. In China, in particular, *ayis* can find themselves in an ambiguous residence situation. Officially, Chinese require a permit to move to other cities than their "hometown," that is, their birthplace where they have residence status (*hukou*). Without this residence permit, workers do not have access to public services and can be "deported" at any time. Commonly, the *hukou* can only be moved from one place to another through the demand of the employer and under specific work contract conditions. Most low-skill or unskilled jobs (like nannies) do not fulfil these. Yet, most cities tolerate migrant workers without *hukou*. In some cities, like in Ningbo when we lived there, migrant workers had access to local public services, and their residence status was recognized de facto. In other cities or at other times, migrants are expelled and "resettled." Unskilled migrant workers are essential for cities to function, yet the precarity of their status is essential to their exploitation, too. Hence, our attempt to find an *ayi* with *hukou* was quickly frustrated because it conflicted with another necessity of employing a helper: the helper's proficiency in Mandarin. Yet, unskilled women who had *hukou* in Ningbo were local from birth and with little formal education and hence were not Mandarin speakers. Mandarin-speaking *ayis* with

hukou simply did not exist, and *ayi* agencies do their best to obfuscate the question to such a point that it is, as a foreigner, impossible to know the exact residence status of the domestic helper.

Our other attempt to act on the precarity of domestic helpers' work was to ensure adequate pay and working conditions. Tronto (2002, 39) warns that "given the low levels of pay, the working conditions, and the high level of arbitrariness that employers can exercise, domestic servants are highly vulnerable to abuse." The economic asymmetry of *ayis* and their employers, as well as their precarious residence status, indeed puts them, in principle, in a weak position to negotiate their salaries or working conditions. In terms of law, domestic workers have few resources to strengthen their position. Independent worker unions are not allowed in China, and the state- or party-managed worker unions are bound to certain industries and state-owned enterprises. Since educational certificates and professional qualification are, among others, a prerequisite for party membership, very few unskilled workers are party members (which gives access to a number of services and, importantly, legal-political backing).

When we were staying in China, however, an additional factor bolstered the position of *ayis*.

The supply of unskilled female labor was becoming short, and this put nannies locally in a favorable position to negotiate their contracts, working conditions, and salaries. With the growing demand and decreasing availability of unskilled workers, expatriate families were rivaling among each other, with Chinese families, and with factories or other service sector jobs. For us, this meant that in the time of one and a half years, we employed three *ayis*: the first left after two months when her husband found a better paying job in another city, and the second left after another six months for a job as cleaning personnel, which she found easier to manage than child care. Our third *ayi* left after our daughter enrolled in preschool at the age of two. All three had been hired through the intersecting channels of the local community network of *ayis* (of the families of UNNC staff) and the local expat agency. The agency provided a simple background check, basic training, and a pro forma contract and facilitated the initial interview. All three *ayis* spoke to other *ayis* in the neighborhood before or after the interview to obtain as much information as possible about us. For us, too, the community of *ayis* in the neighborhood was a crucial conduit of information on the *ayi* to be recruited and, after her departure, on her whereabouts and motivations.

Given the difficulties of communication between *ayis* and families, and the overall precarious situation of the employing families' stay in China, departures of *ayis* were a common cause of anxiety, distrust, and conflict. As with all care work, a particular bond is woven between the *ayi*

and the children in her care, and this affective-emotional bond is at odds with the market logic of competitive recruitment. This is a dilemma that complicates the employment situation not only for the employing family but also for the *ayi*, who has to seek to establish a close relationship with the child but who also has to keep a "professional distance." Writing about nannies in Chinese middle-class families in Shanghai, Su, Ni, and Ji (2018, 385) comment that "Raising urban babies often brings joy and a new sense of purpose to their (the *ayis*') life. . . . Yet, building relationships with the children of urban families requires professionalism and caution, as not to invade the guarded territory of urban mothers. With work and life compressed into a single space, many boundaries are tested, and occasionally negotiated, between nannies and urban mothers." The same need for caution and negotiated boundaries exist for nannies in expatriate families, except that the commonly shared affection and care for the child offer what is often the only line of communication for the parents and the *ayi*, given the language and cultural barriers.

Offering a wage and working conditions that could rival factory or service sector jobs was therefore not only a matter of maintaining a decent employer relationship with the *ayi* but also a necessary condition of retaining the *ayi* over a longer time frame. Hence, we first offered a five-day week with nine working hours (9 to 6) and a thirteenth month payment for Chinese New Year; the *ayis* insisted on a six-day working week, and our third *ayi* moved her working hours to 8 to 5. Her wage was comparable to a well-paid factory job, and whenever we employed her overtime we offered her a higher rate of pay. Her wage and working hours were carefully negotiated with her and in consultation with other parents on campus in order to avoid undue competition between *ayis* in the neighborhood. Offering reasonable working conditions did, indeed, establish a relationship of respect between us, the employing family, and the *ayi* that eased the hierarchical relationship between employer and employee.

Another important aspect of equalizing the relationship was to respect the *ayi* as a professional of child care in China, which in practice meant not essentializing linguistic and cultural differences and accepting that my mothering was necessarily incomplete, maybe inappropriate, and in need of outside help. The fact that I recognized my incapacity to stay in full control of my mothering practices placed the *ayi* into a relationship in which she could gain a position of (albeit limited) power over me and my family; recognizing the incompleteness of our motherhood also enabled solidarity among the two of us as working mothers. Beyond the recognition of us being women who have set children into this world, we also recognized each other in our vulnerability as mothers and as migrants.

The *ayi's* dilemmas were, indeed, situationally similar to mine in that her work (enabled through equal migration constraints to men) allowed her to live up to her (particular) mothering expectations: her salary allowed her to bring her daughter to the city to go to school in Ningbo. Cultural differences and socioeconomic hierarchies do not disappear in such relationships, nor are they absorbed or silenced. On the contrary, they might be revealed even more sharply; yet, this makes awareness possible, which is, in turn, a condition of their toleration. As Appiah argues, cosmopolitanism does not make the strangeness go away, but it makes it familiar and, hence, tolerable (Appiah 2007, 78). The familiarity of strangeness and the practical enactment of contextualized togetherness take the stereotypical sting out of these interactions. Over time, the *ayi's* and my differences in parenting appeared less and less as essentialist, cultural differences and more and more as individual caring styles, predicated and conditioned by our very different contexts of caring. Hence, the question of whether an outside temperature of 23° C required two or one pair of tights for the baby could not be resolved, other than through the practical experience of our *ayi* going out of the house with a one-pair-of-tights baby to please us, and we, in return, pretending not to see when she sneaked into the house an hour or so later, after having born the reproaches of the other *ayis* on the playground, to get the second pair.

Children, too, grow into this multiplicity, and not only in purely linguistic terms (my second daughter's first words were in Chinese). The dialogue about the translation between and the daily lived experience of differences allows integrating this multiplicity and enables cultural code-switching[4]. The simple fact that an *ayi* is of a different cultural, national, and eventually ethnic background is not enough to raise children in racist attitudes of othering; contrary to Tronto's concern, the inclusion of an other-cultured carer can provide a space for children to develop and feel accepted in their own multiplicity (similar to other mult-national and multilingual spaces; see Moore and Barker 2012, Sears 2011).

CONCLUSION

Cosmopolitan mothering requires a certain capacity to "foreignize" one's own situation, that is, to perceive, understand, and accept that my "I" is the extraordinary that requires translation into a familiar other (Venuti 2013). For me as a Western expat, this meant also to "minoritize" my position and to situate myself in a transitory, transnational, and ambiguous situation with respect to the *ayi* who would, should, or could take a dominant

position as being the one who is "at home" (the concept of minoritizing oneself in translation is taken from Bielsa 2016). The *ayi*, on the other hand, was equally confronted with the requirement of "ceding" to our demands that might have seemed strange, incomprehensible, or even cruel in terms of caring for the child (e.g., the demand not to carry the child but to make her walk even if she was requesting to be picked up).

Cosmopolitan mothering means situating oneself, one's family, and the encounter with the other into a wider context of dialogue, exchange, and recognition. It smoothens the edges of the multiple dilemmas of equality and difference that are bestowed on working mothers in foreign lands because as mother, I situate myself into a complex web of social relations. Consequently, cosmopolitan mothering allows for the coexistence of multiple facets in each of the multiple personalities one takes up: a mother, a working woman, a partner, and a culturally, socially, and also politically different person. Cosmopolitan mothering, therefore, provides an alternative to individualist feminist conceptions that represent all too often the choices between motherhood and work and between being at home and being a foreigner, as essential either/or choices as if our identities were one, indivisible and atomistic. Since cosmopolitan mothering allows inscribing oneself, the *ayi*, and the children into a larger web of social and cultural links, it postulates individual incompleteness and complementation through the other, however defined.

Cosmopolitanism recognizes the importance of maintaining and constantly renewing these communications across social or cultural boundaries without essentializing either individuals or communities. Mothering "in strangeness"—in expatriate (or, more generally, migration) contexts—means navigating these relations for the sake of others. Cosmopolitanism is no panacea to globalized problems of structural socioeconomic hierarchies and injustice, but it offers ways and practices that allow individuals to juggle globalization's multiplicity because it allows for incommensurability. Cosmopolitanism includes the possibility of silence because it imparts the necessity to accept the untranslatable as untranslatable. Particularly for migrants, cosmopolitanism offers the possibility to mediate between their many different life worlds and to establish relationships that integrate constant negotiations of the cultural clashes, conflicts, and encounters without requiring an absolute solution of the unsolvable. In the past, cosmopolitan political theory had been starkly criticized for its Eurocentrism and its liberalism, which make it appear deeply steeped in liberal and individualist traditions and give rise to universalist normative claims about world politics (see Fine 2007; Scholte 2014; for critique, see Bhambra and Narayan 2017; Calhoun 2002; Glenn 2000). Cosmopolitan practices like

cosmopolitan mothering, however, emphasize the contextual and relational aspect of cosmopolitanism as a social practice or habitus of communication. The critique of political cosmopolitanism is certainly correct that it cannot rid the world of the socially stratifying effects of global capitalism or of the social, cultural, and racial segregation of global institutions (Bhambra and Narayan 2017); yet, social cosmopolitanism involves a strong reflexivity that opens up the possibility for critically questioning and rethinking precisely these dynamics.

NOTES

1. Other languages use separate words for the different meanings. In German, for instance, we use two different words for "home": *Heimat* to designate the place of origin and *Heim* or *zu Hause* as the place of familiar, everyday life.
2. In China, the parents' reluctance to school their children locally was additionally matched by the resistance of many local schools to enroll foreign children (even though they are legally obliged to do so) because they lack the resources to offer catch-up or English-medium classes. This was particularly the case for elder foreign children who do not speak, read, or write Mandarin. According to the national curriculum (https://baike.baidu.com/item/全日制义务教育语文课程标准#2_2), pupils should be able read 1,600 characters, and write 800 characters in grades 1 to 2; read 2,500 characters and write 2,000 characters in grades 3 to 4; read 3,000 characters and write 2,500 characters in grades 5 to 6; read 3,500 characters and write 3,000 characters in grades 7 to 9.
3. Mandarin Chinese is officially the national language of China; however, it actually is the language spoken in Beijing and surroundings (普通话，*putonghua*). Most Chinese speak local languages or dialects that have little to do with Mandarin.
4. Originally, code-switching designates a habit of multilingual people to switch from one language to another within one sentence in order to use the most fitting words for the situation they are talking about. Commonly, the words of the minority language are fitted into the grammar of the dominant language.

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